

OPEN LETTERS.

Drying Plants.

On reading the Herbarium number of the GAZETTE I noticed that none of the writers on specimen making had mentioned a plan adopted by myself a few years ago, while botanizing in Nova Scotia. Though not to be recommended for common use as the specimens fall short of those obtained by the ordinary methods, yet, if so situated that an abundance of driers is not obtainable, or, if the climate be so foggy and wet that they can not be properly dried, I think it will be found of practical value. On the trip referred to a large number of specimens had been collected, but so bad was the weather from rain and sea fogs that there was great danger of losing them all. Under these circumstances advantage was taken of occasional glimpses of sunshine in the following way: each sheet of specimens was placed between two driers and these were spread in a single layer on the floor of an open balcony. Pieces of board placed in the sun, logs or bark, would of course answer the same purpose. Small stones laid on the corners of the sheets prevented the wind disturbing them, and no pressure was used except the weight of the single drier covering the specimens. An hour of good sunshine served to fully cure most plants. This plan is only applicable to specimens previously somewhat wilted in the press, as the leaves of fresh or insufficiently wilted ones curled up from the absence of pressure.

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A Collection of Exotics.

In reply to the suggestion of Prof. W. W. Bailey concerning exotics in the herbarium, I may state that in the herbarium of the United States National Museum we have undertaken to form precisely the kind of a collection he mentions.

It is the policy of the National Museum to publish, in the form of bulletins, investigations upon the natural history of various interesting localities. With this in view Prof. Baird issued a circular bearing date of March 1, 1883, requesting information and lists of the cultivated plants of the District of Columbia. A committee of botanists was also appointed by the Biological Society of Washington to assist in the collection and preparation of this material. For several years but little was accomplished, but on the formal establishment of an herbarium in the museum the matter was taken up with energy. A competent collector, who is also a practical gardener, was employed, and several thousand specimens have been collected from the public parks and greenhouses.

As many of these plants are being cultivated without scientific names the first work will be their proper scientific determination. This will often be a matter of great difficulty, as their native country will be unknown, and moreover exotics that have long been cultivated are generally burdened with an extensive synonymy, but with a good named herbarium of foreign plants for comparison much may be accomplished.

When finally mounted for exhibition or study each specimen will be labeled with its accepted scientific name, the common name under which it is cultivated, its native country, and such other data as will be likely to be of interest. As for keeping these specimens separate from the general herbarium, we shall probably not be able to do so on account of limited space, although the suggestion of Prof. Bailey to this effect may be a good one. At any rate a collection of this character will furnish a source of popular information of undoubted value.

United States National Museum.

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